

DEALING WITH PRESSURE TO HAVE SEX

The pressure is on, isn't it? Pressure about grades, after-school jobs, chores at home, what your friends want you to do, and what your parents want you to do. The pressure is also on big time when it comes to having sex or doing other sexual things before you are ready. It may seem like everybody around you is having sex. The truth is, everybody may be *talking* about sex, but not every person your age is *having* sex. And what about what you see on TV, in the movies, and even on-line? Sex may be everywhere, but they don't show you the whole story. You often don't see what can happen after sex – having a baby before being ready and getting sexually transmitted diseases (STDs) that can hurt you, such as herpes, chlamydia and HIV. Remember: It's okay not to have sex!

What you don't often hear about sex

- ✓ Having sex before you are ready can make you feel badly about yourself.
- ✓ If someone wants to break up because you won't have sex, then that person isn't good enough for you.
- ✓ Having sex at a young age can make it more likely to get a STD.
- ✓ Dating or hooking up with someone who is older can cause more pressure to have sex before you are ready.
- ✓ Condoms will lower your chances of getting pregnant or getting an STD such as HIV, but they do not protect you from all STDs. Birth control pills can also stop pregnancy, but they do not protect against **any** STDs. Neither method can stop you from getting hurt emotionally.

Things that put the pressure on to have sex

- ✓ Worry over what your friends might think about you.
- ✓ Thinking your friends are doing it.
- ✓ The person you are hooking up with wants to.
- ✓ It's easier to give in than explain why you don't want to.
- ✓ Thinking you need to have sex in order to show you care or be closer.

What if you have had sex already, but now you know you weren't ready?

You can still choose to wait until you are older to have sex again.

Ways you can avoid pressure to have sex

- ✓ Spend time with friends who also think it's okay not to have sex.
- ✓ Date different people and hang out with different groups of friends.
- ✓ Go out with a group instead of only the person you are hanging out with.
- ✓ Have your friends over to your house and make sure they meet your parents/caregivers. You can be in control anywhere you go, but your own turf can be more comfortable.
- ✓ Carry a cell phone and money for a cab, or call a parent/caregiver or friend if you need to get away from someone.
- ✓ Practice saying "no" ahead of time, in case someone tries to pressure you.
- ✓ Don't feel like you owe someone sex in return for a night out or a gift.
- ✓ Say "no" and mean "no" if that's how you feel – people who really care about you will respect your choice.
- ✓ Stay away from alcohol and drugs, which can make it hard to think clearly.

If someone forces you to do anything sexually, tell a trusted adult or call the National Sexual Assault Hotline at 1-800-656-4673 (HOPE).

For more information on STDs and feeling good about yourself, visit www.GirlsHealth.gov!



U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Office on Women's Health